

**LOW INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE
PROGRAM
Integrity Assessment Supplement**

Fiscal Year 2013



**State of Alaska
Heating Assistance Program
Division of Public Assistance
Department of Health & Social Services**

August 2012

**William J. Streur
Commissioner**

**Sean Parnell
Governor**

STATE OF ALASKA
FY 2013
PROGRAM INTEGRITY ASSESSMENT SUPPLEMENT
Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

ABSTRACT:

HHS is requiring further detail from Grantees on their FY2013 plans for preventing and detecting fraud, abuse, and improper payments. HHS is also requiring that Grantees highlight and describe all elements of this FY2013 plan which represent improvements or changes to the Grantees' FY2013 plan for preventing and detecting fraud, abuse and improper payment prevention.

Instructions: *Please provide full descriptions of the Grantee's plans and strategy for each area, and attach/reference excerpts from relevant policy documents for each question/column. Responses must explicitly explain whether any changes are planned for the new FY.*

State, Tribe or Territory (and grant official): STATE OF ALASKA		Date/Fiscal Year: FY 2013	
RECENT AUDIT FINDINGS			
Describe any audit findings of material weaknesses and reportable conditions, questioned costs and other findings cited in FY2013 or the prior three years, in annual audits, Grantee monitoring assessments, Inspector General reviews, or other Government Agency reviews of LIHEAP agency finances.	Please describe whether the cited audit findings or relevant operations have been resolved or corrected. If not, please describe the plan and timeline for doing so in FY2013.	If there is no plan in place, please explain why not.	Necessary outcomes from these systems and strategies
<i>No issues in 2010 and 2011. In 2009 audit found 18 payments charged to the wrong account code.</i>	Problem was fixed in 2009 by doing AJE's and changing the charge to the correct account code.	N/A	<i>The timely and thorough resolution of weaknesses or reportable conditions as revealed by the audit.</i>

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act Of 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13), public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information.

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An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

COMPLIANCE MONITORING			
Describe the Grantee's FY 2012 strategies that will continue in FY 2013 for monitoring compliance with State and Federal LIHEAP policies and procedures by the Grantee and local administering agencies.	Please highlight any strategies for compliance monitoring from your plan which will be newly implemented as of FY 2013.	If you don't have a firm compliance monitoring system in place for FY 2012, please describe how the State is verifying that LIHEAP policy and procedures are being followed.	Necessary outcomes from these systems and strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Single Audit by legislative audit</i> • <i>5% of all seasoned workers' cases are reviewed by senior staff/Eligibility Office Manager.</i> • <i>100% of all new workers' cases are reviewed by same</i> 	Nothing new	N/A	<i>A sound methodology, with a schedule for regular monitoring and a more effective monitoring tool to gather information.</i>

FRAUD REPORTING MECHANISMS			
For FY 2012 activities continuing in FY 2013, please describe all (a) mechanisms available to the public for reporting cases of suspected LIHEAP fraud, waste or abuse [These may include telephone hotlines, websites, email addresses, etc.]; (b) strategies for advertising these resources.	Please highlight any tools or mechanisms from your plan which will be newly implemented in FY 2013, and the timeline for that implementation.	If you don't have any tools or mechanisms available to the public to prevent fraud or improper payments, please describe your plan for involving all citizens and stakeholders involved with your program in detecting fraud.	Necessary outcomes of these strategies and systems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Information/Brochure on HAP website</i> • <i>Information in application packet</i> • <i>Help Us Stop Fraud Brochure</i> • <i>Reports to HAP office via phone, fax or e-mail</i> 	Nothing new	N/A	<i>Clear lines of communication for citizens, grantees, clients, and employees to use in pointing out potential cases of fraud or improper payments to State administrators.</i>

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VERIFYING APPLICANT IDENTITIES			
Describe all FY 2012 Grantee policies continuing in FY2013 for how identities of applicants and household members are verified.	Please highlight any policy or strategy from your plan which will be newly implemented in FY 2013.	If you don't have a system in place for verifying applicant's identities, please explain why and how the Grantee is ensuring that only authentic and eligible applicants are receiving benefits.	Necessary outcomes from these systems and strategies
<i>All applicants and household members are checked against the State's Eligibility Information System (EIS), the Dept. of Labor (DOL), Child Support and Enforcement (CSSD) databases. If the recipient receives social security, SVES is checked. For those who are self employed, they must submit tax returns.</i>	None planned	N/A	<i>Income and energy supplier data that allow program benefits to be provided to eligible individuals.</i>
SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER REQUESTS			
Describe the Grantee's FY 2013 policy in regards to requiring Social Security Numbers from applicants and/or household members applying for LIHEAP benefits.	Please describe whether the State's policy for requiring or not requiring Social Security numbers is new as of FY2013, or remaining the same.	If the Grantee is not requiring Social Security Numbers of LIHEAP applicants and/or household members, please explain what supplementary measures are being employed to prevent fraud.	Necessary outcomes from these systems and strategies
<i>Required for all household members before an award is issued. This was put into regulation in FY 2012.</i>	Same as 2012	N/A	<i>All valid household members are reported for correct benefit determination.</i>

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CROSS-CHECKING SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS AGAINST GOVERNMENT SYSTEMS/DATABASES			
Describe if and how the Grantee used existing government systems and databases to verify applicant or household member identities in FY 2012 and continuing in FY 2013. (Social Security Administration Enumeration Verification System, prisoner databases, Government death records, etc.)	Please highlight which, if any, policies or strategies for using existing government databases will be newly implemented in FY 2013.	If the Grantee won't be cross checking Social Security Numbers and ID information with existing government databases, please describe how the Grantee will supplement this fraud prevention strategy.	Necessary outcomes from these systems and strategies
<p><i>We will use SEVS to check proof of income, and therefore identify, for applicants who do not provide proof of social security income.</i></p> <p><i>We were using Vinelink to check prisoner databases but found that system unreliable and inaccurate.</i></p>	<p>We will be checking our state's prisoner database, ACOM, to check for incarcerated applicants. This will be done through a weekly download report which will create an alert notifying the caseworker to check ACOM for more information including dates of incarceration. This interface will search by name, DOB, and partial social security number.</p>	<p>The State is attempting to reach SSA to obtain SOLQ access. The program coordinator is awaiting a response to messages left with the regional SSA office regarding an agreement.</p>	<p><i>Use of all available database systems to make sound eligibility determination.</i></p>
VERIFYING APPLICANT INCOME			
Describe how the Grantee or designee used State Directories of new hires or similar systems to confirm income eligibility in FY 2012 and continuing in FY 2013.	Please highlight any policies or strategies for using new hire directories which will be newly implemented in FY 2013.	If the Grantee won't be using new hire directories to verify applicant and household member incomes how will the Grantee be verifying the that information?	Necessary outcomes from these systems and strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>We check the State's Dept of Labor database.</i> <i>We check the State's EIS system to see what they have reported to other programs.</i> <i>We will use SVES to check proof of income.</i> <i>We will use the work number to verify income if available.</i> <i>We also request that the client send proof of income.</i> 	<p>Nothing new.</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p><i>Effective income determination achieved through coordination across program lines.</i></p>

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PRIVACY-PROTECTION AND CONFIDENTIALITY			
Describe the financial and operating controls in place in FY 2012 that will continue in FY 2013 to protect client information against improper use or disclosure.	Please highlight any controls or strategies from your plan which will be newly implemented as of FY 2013.	If you don't have relevant physical or operational controls in place to ensure the security and confidentiality of private information disclosed by applicants, please explain why.	Necessary outcomes from these systems and strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confidentiality policies are spelled out in Alaska's Administrative Procedures Manual, Section 100-3 (see Attachment) the Heating Assistance Policy Manual Section 3000-1E, and Procedures Manuals Section 12. The same workers who work cases do not deal with the money. Our account tech deals with money but does not process cases. Info on cases are not shared with outside parties without a release of information or verbal permission by client to release to that party. Confidential client information shared with anyone outside of the state is sent via a secure website (YouSendIt). Confidentiality is covered on page 2 of the vendor manual. 	Nothing new	N/A	Clear and secure methods that maintain confidentiality and safeguard the private information of applicants.

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LIHEAP BENEFITS POLICY			
Describe FY 2012 Grantee policies continuing in FY 2013 for protecting against fraud when making payments, or providing benefits to energy vendors on behalf of clients.	Please highlight any fraud prevention efforts relating to making payments or providing benefits which will be newly implemented in FY 2013.	If the Grantee doesn't have policy in place to protect against improper payments when making payments or providing benefits on behalf of clients, what supplementary steps is the Grantee taking to ensure program integrity.	Necessary outcomes from these systems and strategies
<p><i>Benefits are paid directly to vendors unless a person self-harvests wood or their heat is included in their rent.</i></p> <p><i>If their heat is included in their rent, they must submit a copy of their lease verify this fact and a copy of their rent receipt. Then the payment is made directly to the client.</i></p> <p><i>If a client self-harvests wood, they must provide receipts showing that they purchased materials to self harvest such as chain saw blades, a chain saw, gas to run the chain saw, etc.</i></p> <p><i>Vendors must confirm all payments by sending back a copy of the client's award notice with their initials and the date the account was credited noted thereon.</i></p> <p><i>Clients are required to submit a copy of their bill with their application to prove costs and to verify account information.</i></p> <p><i>Changes were put into our regulations that clearly define the acceptable use of heating assistance payments (see attached)</i></p>	Nothing new	N/A	Authorized energy vendors are receiving payments on behalf of LIHEAP eligible clients.

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PROCEDURES FOR UNREGULATED ENERGY VENDORS			
Describe the Grantee's FY 2012 procedures continuing in FY 2013 for averting fraud and improper payments when dealing with bulk fuel dealers of heating oil, propane, wood and other un-regulated energy utilities.	Please highlight any strategies policy in this area which will be newly implemented in FY 2013.	If you don't have a firm plan for averting fraud when dealing with unregulated energy vendors, please describe how the Grantee is ensuring program integrity.	Necessary outcomes from these systems and strategies
<p><i>The State has vendor agreements with each vendor.</i></p> <p><i>Each vendor must confirm all payments by sending back a copy of the client's award notice with their initials and the date the account was credited.</i></p>	Nothing new	N/A	<p><i>Participating vendors are thoroughly researched and inspected before benefits are issued.</i></p>
VERIFYING THE AUTHENTICITY OF ENERGY VENDORS			
Describe Grantee FY 2012 policies continuing in FY 2013 for verifying the authenticity of energy vendors being paid under LIHEAP, as part of the Grantee's procedure for averting fraud.	Please highlight any policies for verifying vendor authenticity which will be newly implemented in FY 2013.	If you don't have a system in place for verifying vendor authenticity, please describe how the Grantee can ensure that funds are being distributed through valid intermediaries?	Necessary outcomes from these systems and strategies
<p><i>Vendors submit their EIN and/or taxpayer ID on a W-9 form along with their vendor agreement/application.</i></p>	Nothing new	N/A	<p><i>An effective process that effectively confirms the existence of entities receiving federal funds.</i></p>

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TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE			
In regards to fraud prevention, please describe elements of your FY 2012 plan continuing in FY 2013 for training and providing technical assistance to (a) employees, (b) non-governmental staff involved in the eligibility process, (c) clients, and (d) energy vendors.	Please highlight specific elements of your training regimen and technical assistance resources from your plan which will represent newly implemented in FY 2013.	If you don't have a system in place for anti-fraud training or technical assistance for employees, clients or energy vendors, please describe your strategy for ensuring all employees understand what is expected of them and what tactics they are permitted to employ.	Necessary outcomes from these systems and strategies
<p><i>Employee training covers expectations, boundaries and the process they should follow to bring fraud issues or concerns to the supervisor for further action.</i></p> <p><i>Long-standing relationships with vendors have fostered an environment where they feel comfortable calling the HAP unit to report any concerns they have regarding fraud or improper use of fuel. The State's expectations and proper use of benefits is clearly covered in the vendor manual which is sent out annually with our pre-season information packets.</i></p>	None	N/A	<p><i>The timely and thorough resolution of weaknesses or reportable conditions as revealed by the audit.</i></p>

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AUDITS OF LOCAL ADMINISTERING AGENCIES			
Please describe the annual audit requirements in place for local administering agencies in FY 2012 that will continue into FY 2013.	Please describe new policies or strategies to be implemented in FY 2013.	If you don't have specific audit requirements for local administering agencies, please explain how the Grantee will ensure that LIHEAP funds are properly audited under the Single Audit Act requirements.	Necessary outcomes from these systems and strategies
<i>N/A – do not use outside agencies</i>	N/A	N/A	<i>Reduce improper payments, maintain local agency integrity, and benefits awarded to eligible households.</i>

Additional Information

Please attach further information that describes the Grantee's Program Integrity Policies, including supporting documentation from program manuals, including pages/sections from established LIHEAP policies and procedures.

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QUESTION REGARDING SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER REQUESTS

State of Alaska Heating Assistance Regulations

7 AAC 44.020. Application for heating assistance

✚ (a) An application for heating assistance under 7 AAC [44.010](#) - 7 AAC [44.090](#) may be submitted only by an adult or emancipated minor who is

(1) included in the household; or

(2) authorized by the household to act on the household's behalf.

(b) An application may be submitted

(1) in person to a department office or fee agent; or

(2) to the department by electronic mail, facsimile transmission, or United States mail.

(c) To be considered for an annual heating assistance payment, an identifiable application must be postmarked or received by the department on or after September 1 of a year, but not later than April 30 of the following year.

(d) The department will determine eligibility for heating assistance only when the department possesses a completed application. The department possesses a completed application when

(1) the application form provided by the department includes

(A) the full name, date of birth, **social security number**, and citizenship of each household member;

(B) the amount and frequency of income received by each household member;

(C) a description of the household's dwelling for which heating assistance is requested; and

(D) the signature or witnessed mark of the applicant; and

(2) all supporting documents required by the application form are submitted to the department, including proof of the household's regular purchasing and consumption of energy in the dwelling for which heating assistance is requested.

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✚ **History:** Eff. 1/24/80, Register 73; am 6/22/80, Register 74; am 12/23/80, Register 77; am 5/21/81, Register 78; am 6/30/83, Register 86; am 11/1/89, Register 112; am 12/22/94, Register 132; am 10/1/99, Register 151; am 10/1/2009, Register 191; am 11/5/2011, Register 200
✚ **Authority:** [AS 45.48.410](#)

QUESTION REGARDING PRIVACY-PROTECTION AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Alaska Administrative Manual Section 100

100-3 CONFIDENTIALITY

There are very specific laws and regulations that protect information about Division of Public Assistance clients.

Applicants for, and recipients of, public assistance must make known to division staff intimate facts about their personal lives in order for their eligibility to be determined.

Other personal and sensitive information (such as disclosure of domestic violence or substance abuse) necessary to secure supportive services or to provide effective referrals to community resources also may be shared with division staff. Because applicants and recipients often are under extreme financial and personal stresses they may be particularly vulnerable to exploitation if their situation were known. This may be true even when certain information is disclosed to other members of the household.

Therefore, all people served by the division are in particular need of the protection of privacy and confidentiality:

- Against the identification of the individual as belonging to a special group segregated on the basis of their need for public assistance;
- Against exploitation for commercial, personal, or political purposes; and
- Against making information available as a basis for prosecution and other proceedings except in connection with the enforcement of public assistance program laws.

Refer to [Addendum 100-A](#) and [Addendum 100-B](#) in this manual for the Alaska statutes on confidentiality and misuse of public assistance records, and regulations on safeguarding and disclosure of client information.

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100-3 A. DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

It is against the law to use or disclose information obtained from households unless it is to:


- Persons authorized by a client-signed Release of Information form;
- Persons directly connected with the administration of the programs;
- Persons directly connected with the enforcement of the provisions of the programs;
or
- Persons directly connected with other federal or federally funded assistance programs such as Supplemental Security Income, Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, or the School Lunch Program.

Staff normally does not release information or material from any case record to anyone or any agency without first obtaining a written consent from the client. This includes local and state police departments, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the US Citizenship and Immigration Services.

There are exceptions to releasing information without the client's consent. Refer to Administrative Procedure Manual Sections [100-3D](#), [100-3E](#), [100-3F](#), and [100-3G](#) for exceptions to releasing information without the client's consent.

In addition, [DPA](#)  staff may release information to the Department's Office of Children's Services and to Adult Protective Services if they report suspected abuse or neglect of a child or adult. See [section 100-9](#) in this manual.

100-3 B. CLIENT ACCESS TO INFORMATION

An applicant or recipient is entitled access to his or her own case file, including electronic information contained in [EIS](#) . In addition, any person to whom the client authorizes access by means of a written, signed, and dated authorization is entitled access to that client's case file. No reason for desiring access needs to be given.

IMPORTANT:

Information relating to domestic violence issues, specific victims, and identifying information that could compromise the family's health and safety cannot be released to anyone without the victim's permission. This

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*includes formal referrals and agency contacts with community resources
and members of the household.*

The client is entitled to a prompt, full, and courteous explanation of why each piece of information in the file was gathered, and explanations of the purpose of each form in the file.

If a client objects to an entry in their file of a particular piece of information, and if a supervisor determines that the objectionable entry was and is unrelated to the determination of eligibility, the entry will be totally and permanently deleted from the record.

Prior to allowing the client or the client's authorized representative access to the case file folder, a designated agency employee will take the following steps:

1. Review the case file folder and remove all confidential information protected from release. This includes:
 - Adoption materials,
 - Information relating to substance abuse,
 - Information relating to domestic violence,
 - Names of individuals who have disclosed information about the client without his or her knowledge, and
 - The nature and status of pending criminal prosecution or fraud referrals and investigations.
2. Obtain positive identification of the client or the client's representative.
3. Verify a written authorization by comparing signatures in the case file folder to that on the authorization. (If questionable, contact the client to ensure he or she has authorized access to the client's case file folder.)

An employee of the Division will be present during the entire time the client or client's representative has access to the case file folder. At no time will the client or client's representative be left alone with the case file folder. At no time shall the case file folder leave the DPA  office with the client or client's representative.

The Division will provide copies of documents in the case file folder, except for those noted in step 1 above, at the client's request. No charge will be made for a small

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number of copies, but costs will be charged for copies over 25 pages. The charge for making copies is \$.10 a page. The Division will not charge additional fees for the time it takes staff to make the copies. Ask the client or client's representative to make the check payable to the State of Alaska. Upon receipt, route the check to:

Finance and Management Services
PO Box 110640
Juneau, AK 99811

Include with the check the following information: client's name and case number, reason for the check, and number of copies made.

100-3 C. DIVISION OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE RESPONSIBILITIES

In addition to following the above laws and regulations, each staff member of the Division has the following responsibilities regarding confidentiality:

- To take every reasonable precaution against leaving identifying information in any office work area to which the public has unsupervised access;
- To remove identifying information from the office only upon approval of an eligibility supervisor and only for purposes related to their official duties;
- To politely refuse to respond to any request for identifying information from any person not in their prudent judgment clearly and literally directly connected to the administration of the assistance program in question and, if necessary, to refer the request to a supervisor;
- To comply promptly and fully with an individual's request to review their own case file, to verify the identity of the individual, and to document the date, time, and circumstances of this access in that case file;
- To comply promptly and fully with a client's written, signed, and dated authorization to allow another person or organization to obtain specified information and to file that authorization in the case file; and
- To immediately report to the DPA  office supervisor any suspected breaches of confidentiality or of office security (such as missing documents or reports, evidence of burglary, etc.).



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100-3 D. LEGISLATIVE REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

There are three different types of legislative requests for information.

- Constituent inquiries;
- Requests for general program information; and
- Requests for Alaska Temporary Assistance financial information.

Each type of request for information is handled differently:

1. "Constituent inquiries", or legislative contacts made on behalf of clients are treated as client inquiries or complaints. By requesting elected officials or their staff to assist with a complaint or issue, the client has authorized the release of information to that person. DPA 's responsibility is to establish to the degree practical that the client is in fact the source of the complaint and that the public official is inquiring on their behalf. No legislative contact report is necessary.
2. Requests and responses to general program information requests must be documented on a DHSS  "Legislative Request/Contact Form". Each program inquiry and response to a legislator or legislative aide must be documented on this form and submitted to the Director's office.
3. Alaska state law and regulations allow legislators access to financial information concerning an eligibility determination for a person applying for or receiving Alaska Temporary Assistance. These requests are different than a constituent inquiry in that the legislator is seeking the information as part of his/her official duties rather than at the request of the client

If you receive such a request, politely inform the caller that the request must be made in writing and refer them to the Director's office. The Director's office will respond to the legislator's request.


100-3 E. SUBPOENAS AND COURT ORDERS


1. Subpoenas

A subpoena is a legal document requiring a specific person to appear and testify in court as a witness. If an employee is served with a subpoena to appear in an official capacity to testify, with or without confidential records:


1. The employee must immediately contact their supervisor and provide the supervisor with a copy of the subpoena.

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2. The supervisor will scan and email a copy of the subpoena to the Attorney General's office. Until directed otherwise, send the subpoena to Assistant Attorney General Stacie Kraly at Stacie.Kraly@alaska.gov, or fax it to her at (907) 465-2539.
3. The supervisor will also send a copy of the subpoena to the [DPA](#)  Director.
4. The employee and the supervisor will take no further action until they receive instructions from the Attorney General's office.

The issuance and serving of a subpoena does not signify that the issue is directly related to the administration of an assistance program. A subpoena must be reported even if it is accompanied with a valid client release of information. See Alaska Administrative Code 7 [AAC](#)  37.050.

2. Court Orders

If a local, state, or federal court orders an employee to appear to testify in an official capacity, with or without confidential materials, the worker should take no action until they report to their supervisor and receive instructions. See 7 [AAC](#)  37.060.

100-3 F. LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS

Generally, law enforcement officials do not have access to [DPA](#)  client information in absence of a court order. There may be times, such as officers responding to a disturbance in a [DPA](#)  office, when officers may ask for client names, addresses, and phone numbers as part of investigating the incident. Rules of confidentiality do apply. However, supervisors must exercise prudent judgment in these situations. The interests of public safety may dictate providing the police with information regarding a client. This might include the name and address of an individual involved in the disturbance.

In addition, the Alaska Temporary Assistance and Food Stamp programs have specific requirements for releasing information about fleeing felons. If a law enforcement officer provides the name of an individual which they say is a felon fleeing to avoid prosecution, custody, or confinement after conviction, or is violating a condition of probation or parole, the current residence address of the individual must be released to the officer. The Food Stamp Program also allows for the release of the social security number and the photo identification on file. See Alaska Temporary Assistance manual [section 710-3](#) and Food Stamp manual section [600-1E](#) for guidance before releasing any information.


100-3 G. OMBUDSMAN

Contacts from the Ombudsman are treated like Legislative Requests described in [100-3D](#) above. Once the caseworker establishes the client made the contact with the

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Ombudsman to assist with a complaint or issue, the client has authorized release of information to the Ombudsman. State statutes specifically provide for the Ombudsman to have access to records of state agencies, including confidential information.

100-3 H. REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION FROM OTHER AGENCIES

A written consent from the client is not required to release public assistance information to or from partner agencies, including contractors and grantees. The following list identifies those agencies that exchange information with DPA  without a written release of information from the client:

1. Department of Labor and Workforce Development



An exception to the confidentiality rule is our ability to share client and case information relating to the Alaska Temporary Assistance, Medicaid, and Food Stamps programs with the Department of Labor and Workforce Development. Federal laws and regulations that cover the Unemployment Insurance (UI), Temporary Assistance, Medicaid, and Food Stamp programs "under one umbrella" allow and encourage all agencies administering these programs to share information.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is under the Department of Labor and also Workforce Development has an agreement with DPA  to share client and case information.

2. Office of Children's Services

The Office of Children's Services (OCS ) has access to client information contained in the Division's Eligibility Information System (EIS ) in order to administer Title IV-E Medicaid.

3. Attorney General's (AG) Office








A written consent from the client is not required to release public assistance information to the Attorney General's Office, which serves as our Division's legal counsel. All requests from the AG 's Office, including the Department of Law's Welfare Fraud Section, for information on a client, material from a case file folder, or an entire case file folder and/or EIS  will be granted. Division staff will comply with all subpoenas for information and case file material issued at the request of the Attorney General's Office.

The caseworker must consult with a supervisor anytime she or he receives a subpoena related to a public assistance client or case.



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The Attorney General's office is available to advise Division staff on all agency-related matters, including disclosures of information, releases of case files, subpoenas and court orders that do not originate from the AG's Office. Contact the Policy and Program Development Team or Chief of Field Operations for assistance prior to contacting the AG's office.

4. Permanent Fund Dividend Division

DPA  has an agreement with the Permanent Fund Dividend Division that authorizes DPA  to release public assistance information to the PFDD  Division. When individuals apply for a PFDD , they sign a release statement authorizing DPA , among other agencies, to release information necessary to verify their eligibility. The PFDD  Division uses the information obtained from DPA  to aid in determining an applicant's Alaska residency status, which is a criterion for eligibility for the dividend.

5. Agencies with Signed Grant Agreements, Contracts, or Memorandums of Agreement with DPA

Several agencies have signed grant agreements or memorandums of agreement with the Division to access client information through EIS  or the Case Management System (CMS ) in order to assist mutual clients in obtaining financial or medical support. All requests from these agencies for information on a client, material from a case file, or an entire case file will be granted:

- Alaska Housing Finance Corporation
- Alaska Pribilof Island Association (Work Services)
- Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium
- Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP)
- Bristol Bay Native Association (BBNA)
- Center for Community
- Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (T&H)
- Catholic Social Services (Refugee Resettlement Program)
- Cook Inlet Tribal Corporation (CITC)
- Job Corps
- Kenaitze Indian Tribe (KIT) Kodiak Area Native Association (Workforce Investment Act)
- Maximus (Alaska Works)
- Metlakatla Indian Community (Employment and Training)
- Nine Star (Work Services)
- North Slope Borough (Workforce Development)
- Social Security Administration (SSA)
- SouthCentral Foundation (SCF)
- Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC)

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Heating Assistance Policy Manual Section 3000-1E
3000-1 E. DISCLOSURE AND USE OF INFORMATION

The DPA restricts the disclosure and use of information obtained from heating assistance households to:

1. Persons directly connected with the administration or enforcement of the Heating Assistance Program.
2. Employees of other federal assistance or federally assisted State means-tested programs for low-income individuals such as TANF, ATAP, Food Stamps, Medicaid, and SSI.
3. Employees of Legislative Audit for audit examination.
4. Officials of local, State, or federal law enforcement agencies to investigate alleged violations of the Heating Assistance Program, if a written request is provided.

All information about an applicant must remain confidential. Discussing a case with a co-worker in order to complete a determination is acceptable. Discussing a case with another DPA employee involving a family member or friend is **not** acceptable. Discussing a case with a friend/acquaintance outside of the office is **not** acceptable.

All written information which specifically identifies an applicant must be properly stored in the appropriate file cabinet when not in use, and properly discarded as necessary (i.e. shredded, ripped up, burned, or archived.)

Workers must not leave identifying applicant information exposed to office visitors.

Workers must not give applicant information to the applicant's landlord, or request applicant information from a landlord, unless the applicant authorizes it or has listed the landlord as a collateral contact. Many applicants do not want their landlords to know that they have applied for heating assistance. Workers must respect applicant privacy.

The following people may be given information regarding a case, upon request. Requests from people other than those listed must be referred to the Program Coordinator. Requests for information from newspaper or radio reporters must always be referred to the Program Coordinator.

Applicant - If an applicant calls to ask for information regarding their HAP case, the worker should ask the person to identify themselves by providing their social security number before revealing any information. The worker must ensure that the information the caller provides matches the information on the application.

Concerned Agency Representatives, Friends, Interpreters - Information may be given to third party representatives *only if* the applicant has authorized their participation and there is a justifiable

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reason why this person is intervening (for example, language barrier, hearing disorder, disability, etc.).

Fee Agent and Department of Public Assistance (DPA) Employees - Workers may answer questions from DPA representatives regarding specific applications.

Legislator or Legislator's Staff - Requests for case specific information in response to a constituent request may be answered by the worker. The Program Coordinator must be informed about the contact.

Ombudsman's Office - Requests for case specific information may be answered by the worker. The Program Coordinator must be informed about the contact. All other Ombudsman calls must be referred to the Program Coordinator.

Vendor - If a vendor calls to ask if one of their customers has applied for heating assistance, the answer to that question may be provided. Information regarding payment to that vendor **only** may be provided.

For specific confidentiality rights and responsibilities, refer to Division of Public Assistance Administrative Procedures Section 100-3, Alaska State Statutes 47.05.020 through 47.05.030, and Alaska Administrative Codes 7 AAC 37.010 through 7 AAC 37.130.

Heating Assistance Procedures Manual Section 12

12.18 CONFIDENTIALITY

All information about an applicant must remain confidential. Discussing a case with a co-worker in order to complete a determination is acceptable. Discussing a case with another DPA employee involving a family member or friend is not acceptable. Discussing a case with a friend/acquaintance outside of the office is not acceptable.

All written information which specifically identifies an applicant must be properly stored in the appropriate file cabinet when not in use, and properly discarded as necessary (i.e. shredded, ripped up, burned, or archived.)

Workers must be conscientious about not leaving identifying applicant information exposed to office visitors.

Workers must not give applicant information to the applicant's landlord, unless the applicant authorizes it or has listed the landlord as a collateral contact. A worker may contact a landlord to learn if heat is included in the rent, if the rent is subsidized, etc. Workers should respect applicant privacy.

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The following people may be given information regarding a case, upon request. Requests from people other than those listed must be referred to the Program Coordinator. Requests for information from newspaper or radio reporters must always be referred to the Program Coordinator.

Applicant - If an applicant calls to ask for information regarding their HAP case, the worker should ask the person to identify themselves by providing their Social Security number before revealing any information. The worker must ensure that the information the caller provides matches the information on the application.

Concerned Agency Representatives, Friends, Interpreters - Information may be given to third party representatives *only if* the applicant has authorized their participation and there is a justifiable reason why this person is intervening (i.e. language barrier, hearing disorder, disability, etc.).

Fee Agent and Department of Public Assistance (DPA) Employees – Workers may answer questions from DPA representatives regarding specific applications.

Legislator or Legislator’s Staff - Requests for case specific information in response to a constituent request may be answered by the worker. The Program Coordinator should be informed about the contact.

Ombudsman’s Office - Requests for case specific information may be answered by the worker. The Program Coordinator should be informed about the contact. All other Ombudsman calls should be referred to the Program Coordinator.

Vendor - If a vendor calls to ask if one of their customers has applied for heating assistance, the answer to that question may be provided. Information regarding payment to that vendor only may be provided.

For specific confidentiality rights and responsibilities, refer to Division of Public Assistance Administrative Procedures, and Alaska State Statutes 47.05020 through 47.05.030, and Alaska Administrative Codes 7 AAC 37.010 through 7 AAC 37.130.

QUESTION REGARDING LIHEAP BENEFIT POLICY

State of Alaska Heating Assistance Regulations

7 AAC 44.051. Use of heating assistance payments

✚ (a) A heating assistance payment may only be used for

(1) the purchase of fuel oil, kerosene, propane, natural gas, electricity, wood, coal, or other petroleum products used for home heating, lighting, or cooking in the household's dwelling;

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(2) gasoline and two-cycle oil for a snowmachine or chain saw used to harvest and transport wood if the household cuts its own wood for home heating and self-harvested wood is the household's primary heating source; or

(3) payment of incidental charges, including deposits, delivery charges, connection fees, and late-payment charges associated with purchase or delivery.

(b) A heating assistance payment may not be used for any purpose not described in (a) of this section. A household or vendor may not sell or barter heating fuel purchased with a heating assistance payment under this section.

(c) A household paying home heating costs indirectly through rent or lease payments shall apply the heating assistance payment toward those rent or lease payments.

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Heating Assistance Program Vendor Manual



**State of Alaska
Heating Assistance Program
Division of Public Assistance
Department of Health & Social Services**

**William J. Streur
Commissioner**

**Sean Parnell
Governor**

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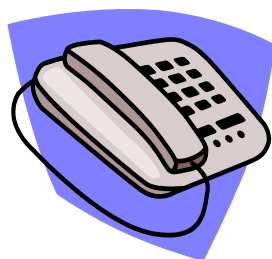
**Heating Assistance Program
Vendor Manual**

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Contact the Heating Assistance Program (HAP) when you have questions, comments or concerns:



Telephone our office in Juneau from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.

(907) 465-3058
1-800-470-3058
Option 2 for Vendor questions
Option 5 for Front desk



Obtain information on the current status of HAP applications on our 24-hour toll-free information hotline.

Anchorage: 269-5777
All other areas:
1-888-804-6330

FAX:

(907) 465-3319

Toll Free:

1-888-282-3319

E-mail us:

liheap@health.state.ak.us



Our website provides helpful information.

<http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dpa/heat>



Write to us:

Heating Assistance Program
400 Willoughby Ave, # 301
Juneau, AK 99801-1700

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Program Overview

The Heating Assistance Program (HAP) provides financial assistance to help low-income households pay their home heating bills. This is done by making a payment or an extension of credit to home heating suppliers on behalf of eligible customers; or by making a one-time direct payment to applicants whose heat is included in their rent or whose fuel is provided by a vendor that does not participate in the program.

The HAP is 100% federally funded by the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) block grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In Alaska, LIHEAP Funds are administered by the Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Assistance and, in some areas, by Indian Tribal Organizations. This manual contains policies and procedures of the state-administered HAP only.

The Heating Assistance Program begins accepting applications from the public on October 1 and begins issuing grants on November 1 of each year. Applications must be postmarked or received in a Public Assistance office by April 30 to be considered for a heating assistance grant. Information received on pended cases will be accepted after the close of the program year as long as it is received within the pending time frame.

Confidentiality

Individuals/Households applying for and receiving heating assistance have the right to expect this information to remain confidential. All information provided by an applicant must remain confidential by all workers, vendors, employees, fee agents. Discussing a case with family or friends is not acceptable. You must also be careful to avoid leaving customer information where it can be seen by others.

You may not give any information to an applicant's landlord, or request information from a landlord, unless the applicant authorizes it in writing or has listed the landlord as a collateral contact. People may not want their landlords to know that they have applied for heating assistance and we need to respect their privacy. It is against the law to use Heating Assistance Program client information for commercial, personal

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or political purposes; or make information available for legal or other proceedings (except in connection with enforcement for public assistance programs).

For specific confidentiality rights and responsibilities, refer to Division of Public Assistance Administrative Procedures and Alaska Statutes 47.05.020 through 47.05.030 and Alaska Administrative Code 7 AAC 37.010 through 7 AAC 37.130.

Eligibility and Benefits

Eligibility for heating assistance and benefit amounts are based on an “energy burden” point system which considers household size and income, fuel costs in the area and type of housing. A household must have a minimum of 2.0 heating cost points to qualify. LIHEAP qualifying income is limited to 150% of the federal poverty guidelines for Alaska. The state-funded program Alaska Affordable Heating Assistance Program (AHAP) is designed to provide benefits to Alaska residents with income from 151% to 225% of the poverty income guidelines.

Households seeking heating assistance must contain an Alaska resident, submit a current application and demonstrate that they pay for home heat. They do not have to have overdue bills to qualify.

Both home owners and renters (including those who pay for heating costs as a portion of their rent) may apply. However, renters that participate in a housing subsidy program that pays all home heating costs are not eligible.

Subsidized Rental Housing Utility Deposit

The Heating Assistance Program provides heating assistance for the minimum amount needed to establish natural gas or electric utility service required to participate in subsidized rental housing. This Subsidized Rental Housing Utility Deposit (SRHUD) is available only if:

- the housing program will fully subsidize the household’s home heating costs;
- the household has not received a Heating Assistance Program payment within 180 days of requesting a SRHUD; and

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- the amount of the SRHUD, up to a maximum of \$500, will be sufficient to establish utility service.

The HAP will accept heating assistance applications for a SRHUD throughout the year. However, a SRHUD is not available more than once in a 24-month period.

Ineligible Households

A household is NOT ELIGIBLE to participate in the heating assistance program if, at the time of eligibility determination, they:

1. are eligible for or has received LIHEAP or state heating assistance benefits from an Indian tribal organization;
2. reside in a crisis center, hotel, motel, tent, or other shelter normally intended for temporary occupancy, and
 - has resided there for less than 60 consecutive days before the date of signature on the completed application; and
 - is not seeking a utility deposit;
3. reside in a hospital, nursing home, state pioneer home, or other public or private institution to receive treatment for a mental or physical illness, student dormitory, correctional facility, or on a military base; or
4. reside in subsidized rental housing and has no direct home heating costs.

Information Hotline

Vendors may call the information hotline to confirm that a customer has applied for heating assistance and the date the application was received in Juneau. Once the grant is issued the name of the vendor(s) and the payment amounts will be available. This information may make it easier for you to decide if you can delay a disconnect, or extend credit to one of your customers.

To access case specific information on the hotline the vendor will need:

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- the Social Security Number of the person listed on line #1 of the heating assistance application, and
- the security code – which is the last 4 digits of the telephone number listed on the heating assistance application. If a telephone number was not listed, the security code is the 4 digit birth year of the person listed on line #1 of the application. For example, 1959.

Vendor Participation Procedure

1. The Heating Assistance Program is implemented primarily through home heating suppliers who have agreed to the conditions of the Heating Assistance Program Vendor Agreement. The agreement outlines HAP and vendor rights and responsibilities. After the initial agreement is signed, agreements will be updated every five years unless there are changes to the original agreement.
2. HAP provides vendors agreement forms and information encouraging their participation in the program. Vendors who wish to participate in the program sign and return the agreement.
3. The Division of Public Assistance countersigns the agreement..
4. A copy of the agreement and current HAP applications are returned to the vendor.

Vendor Payments

1. Prepay vendors
 - a. A Vendor Notice of Actions is generated at the time eligibility is determined for a client.
 - b. The Notice of Action lists the case number, amount of benefit (grant) to be issued, address and account number that will be transmitted for each applicants.

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- c. Payments are made a week to ten days following the eligibility determination and Notice of Action.
- d. The money can be applied to overdue balances and/or to establish credit for the household's future bills.
- e. The vendor must acknowledge receipt of the payment in a timely manner, but within at least 60 days. *It is very important that vendors document receipt of prepayments.* This can be accomplished by the vendor by submitting one of the following:
 - i. a copy of the vendor Notice of Action, with the date payment was received noted next to each applicant's name and a signature by a vendor representative.
 - ii. a statement or list acknowledging receipt of payments and who the payments were for,
 - iii. a copy of the customer's next bill showing that the energy assistance payment has been applied, or
- f. Once the prepay vendor acknowledges payment, HAP personnel enter this confirmation into our computer system. The case is now considered closed.

Year End Deadlines:

- a. Acknowledgment of customer HAP payments must be received prior to the beginning of a new program year.
- b. A reminder requesting these acknowledgments will be sent to vendors who have not provided confirmation in a timely manner

2. Line-of-credit vendors

- a. Vendors receive a Notice of Action showing the amount of credit established for each customer.

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- b. Vendors extend the approved credit amount to the customer.
- c. The vendor then submits the original invoice or a copy of the billing statement to HAP for payment.
- d. Invoices must show:
 - i. customer's name,
 - ii. date of delivery or service to the customer,
 - iii. type of product provided,
 - iv. amount of product delivered and its unit price, and
 - v. amount now due the vendor (past due home energy bills may be submitted by the vendor for payment)
- e. Payments are generated within a week of receipt by the HAP.
- f. When a household's benefits are exhausted, the customer and the vendor receive a Notice of Action stating that the case is closed.
- g. Customer credit must be used by June 30. No draws on HAP credit should be made after that date.
- h. Vendors have until July 15 to submit bills to HAP for payment. If there is credit remaining after that date, HAP will send the remaining credit balance directly to the eligible household.
- i. Once any remaining credit is sent to the customer, it is not possible to make payment on delivery invoices submitted by vendors.

Allowable Purchases with HAP Funds

- 1. Heating Fuel

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Fuel oil, electricity, natural gas, wood, coal, wood pellets, kerosene, propane and blazo are allowable, if used for home heating. The purchase of one bottle of propane with HAP credit is allowed if propane is not a heating source.

2. Utilities

Utility vendors receiving prepayments on behalf of their eligible customers may apply payments only to the home energy portion of the customer's account. *Payments may not be applied to telephone, cable, water, sewer, or garbage, or tank rentals.*

3. Gasoline and Oil for Gathering Wood

- a. Gasoline and two-cycle oil may be purchased with HAP credit if the customer cuts its own wood for home heating. In these cases it is understood that the use of the gasoline and oil are for chain saw and snow machine use in the harvesting and transporting of wood.
- b. Under no circumstances is gasoline to be provided for the operation of automobiles, boats, or other vehicles (except for fuel gathering and transportation of energy sources in rural areas, or if the automobile is the customer's home).
- c. Customers can only purchase gasoline if the vendor notice states, "If you supply chainsaw fuel the above grant may be used to purchase same." If the notice does not state this and that is all the customer uses, *the vendor must contact HAP*. A grant adjustment may have to be made before the customer can get gas.
- d. *HAP will not pay for gas purchases that are not approved.*

4. Other Allowable Expenses

- a. Other allowable expenses include incidental fees related to providing home energy service. Examples of this type of fee are delivery charges,

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utility deposits, membership fees, service connection fees, and late charges.

- b. There cannot be any special charges levied against HAP customers, including the rental of fuel tanks. Other fees which may not have been mentioned above should be cleared with the Juneau HAP office if the vendor wishes to receive payment for them.

Customer Referral and Follow-Up By Vendors

1. Vendors are encouraged to help their customers apply to the Heating Assistance Program. It is helpful if the vendor's credit department personnel are aware of HAP guidelines and Expedite Criteria to refer low-income customers to the program.
2. Vendors are provided with HAP applications and eligibility information at the beginning of each program year.

Maintaining Customer Files

Organization of information regarding HAP eligible customers is the responsibility of each vendor. However, it is advisable to set up individual case files so that when a payment is received, or a question regarding an HAP customer arises, it can be easily located.

Home Heating Emergencies

1. Situations arise which require a heating assistance caseworker to call a vendor to request service delivery before the Notice of Action has been received by the vendor. When this occurs, the customer's eligibility has already been determined with a known grant amount.
2. HAP will not request that a vendor provide service to a customer until eligibility has been determined.
3. Vendors are asked to provide the requested service, but should never do so unless they have:

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- a. received a call from a heating assistance caseworker, **or**
 - b. verified the grant on the information hotline, **or**
 - c. received a Notice of Action, confirming eligibility.
4. Vendors agree to accept verbal confirmation of benefits in order to halt disconnections or restore disconnected services to the client.

Inactive Customer Accounts

1. Prepay Customer Closes Account

- a. If a customer with a prepay HAP credit balance chooses to close its account the vendor must refund the remaining HAP credit to HAP.
- b. When the credit balance is sent to HAP, HAP reissues the payment to another vendor or issues a refund to the customer.
- d. Payments made directly by the customer are not part of the HAP credit and should not be returned to the State.

2. Prepay Customer Dies, or Moves without Closing Account

- a. If a customer with a prepaid HAP credit balance dies, the credit balance may be left on the same service account for use by surviving household members. Contact HAP to verify household members.
- b. If there are no other persons in the deceased person's household, the vendor must promptly refund remaining HAP credit to the State following payment of final bill issued after date of death.
- c. If a customer moves without closing the utility account, or leaving a forwarding address, the vendor must refund any remaining HAP credit to the State.

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Vendor Year-End Deadlines

1. Line-of-Credit Vendors – See page 7.
2. Prepayment Vendors
 - a. Acknowledgment of customer HAP payments must be received prior to the beginning of a new program year.
 - b. A reminder requesting these acknowledgments will be sent via fax to vendors who have not provided confirmation in a timely manner.

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**State of Alaska
Department of Health and Social Services
Heating Assistance Program
Vendor Agreement**

PARTIES

- a. State of Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Assistance, hereinafter called DPA, Heating Assistance Program, hereinafter called HAP, and
- b. _____ hereinafter called the Vendor.
(Name of Home Heating Supplier)

PURPOSE OF AGREEMENT

The purpose of this agreement is to provide for the payment of home heating costs on behalf of low-income households eligible for the Heating Assistance Program (HAP) and Alaska Heating Assistance Program (AKHAP). To accomplish this both parties agree to the following terms and conditions.

DPA CONDITIONS

1. Upon certification of an eligible household, HAP shall send a written Notice of Action to the Vendor and the household. The notice will state the amount of heating assistance available to the household, and how the assistance is to be distributed among its Vendors.
2. HAP shall then make a cash advance payment equal to the amount of heating assistance assigned to the Vendor on the household's behalf.
3. HAP will make heating assistance payments only for home heating products (i.e. fuel oil, electricity, natural gas, propane, wood, wood pellets, coal, and in some cases gasoline when used only to harvest and gather wood). Incidental charges necessary for use and delivery of home heating may be paid from an eligible household's heating assistance benefits (i.e. charges for reconnection of service, late payment, delivery, deposits or memberships).

VENDOR CONDITIONS

1. The Vendor will charge the eligible household, in the normal billing process, the difference between the actual cost of the home energy and the amount of the payment received from HAP. If payment covers only a portion of the balance due, it must be applied to the oldest part of the bill.
2. The Vendor agrees that no household receiving heating assistance will be treated adversely because of such assistance under applicable provision of the State law or public regulatory requirements.

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3. The Vendor agrees not to discriminate, either in cost of goods supplied or the services provided, against the household on whose behalf payments are made. Information about grantees and their benefits is to be kept confidential and the vendor agrees that all employees that have access to client information are required to sign a confidentiality statement. A sample confidentiality statement is included with this agreement and can be requested from the HAP office.
4. The Vendor will, after receipt of the written notice of a household's eligibility and upon the household's request, provide home heating fuel to the eligible household (unless such action violates established company policy). To expedite Vendor notification of a household's eligibility and the delivery of service in emergency situations, Vendors may be advised by telephone by an authorized HAP representative of a household's eligibility in order to expedite delivery of fuel or services and or to reconnect electricity in emergency situations. Vendors can verify by telephone with the HAP office that the request is legitimate before serving the household. Vendors are NOT required by this agreement to serve households before notification from a HAP representative or before written notice of a household's eligibility.
5. Vendors receiving cash advances from HAP on behalf of eligible households for overdue or future home heating bills must promptly provide verification to HAP that the payments were received and credited to the household's account. This may be accomplished by either a signed statement citing the name, date, and the amount credited to the household's account, or by submitting a copy of the household's bill which shows the credited HAP payment. Once confirmation of payment is received by HAP, no further verification of the use of HAP credit is required (except as required by conditions 7 and 8 below).
6. Vendors receiving cash advances on behalf of eligible households must apply such payments only to the home energy portion of the household's account. **Vendors must list the credited HAP payment on the household's bill, invoice or statement.** Payments may be used only for approved home heating products for the eligible households own use (DPA Condition No. 3) and not for any other non-heating related charges.
7. If a household with a prepaid HAP credit balance chooses to close its service account with the Vendor, the remaining credit must be refunded directly to the HAP. The Vendor refunds the balance with a check made payable to the State of Alaska and referencing the customer's name. NOTE: Vendor's are NOT obligated to refund HAP credit upon request of the household unless the household is closing its service account, (i.e. moving or changing home heating vendors).
8. If a household with a prepaid HAP credit balance dies, the credit balance may be left on the same service account for use by surviving family or household members. If there are no other persons in the household continuing to use the service account, the Vendor must promptly refund the remaining credit to the State. Similarly, if a household moves without leaving a forwarding address, the Vendor must promptly refund remaining credit to the State. If a credit balance goes unused for six months and the Vendor cannot contact the client, the credit balance must be refunded to the state.

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